

Islip eyes aid to land TRACON

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The Town of Islip has upped its bid to persuade the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) to build a high-tech airport communications center at [Long Island MacArthur Airport](#), but it's going to need a lot of help.

At stake are 800 air traffic control jobs currently on Long Island.

Town officials are hoping \$4.6 million in property improvements, along with 60 acres – worth roughly \$20 million – will sway the FAA to build its new Terminal Radar Approach Control Facility at MacArthur, replacing two current, smaller facilities, one in Westbury and one in Ronkonkoma. Islip

officials said the project, to be completed by 2019, would create 1,000 construction jobs, retain the 800 aviation positions and perhaps create 200 more.

But cash-strapped Islip is relying on the state to pony up nearly \$5 million to make necessary upgrades to the airport property, including constructing a four-lane, 9,000-foot access road with pedestrian and bike access, utility infrastructure improvements, street lighting, security fencing, signage and landscaping.

The [Long Island Regional Economic Development Council](#) included this improvement project as one of its 16 priority projects, but allocated only \$4.1 million to it. That funding depends on Long Island again being selected as a best-plan awardee, garnering the region \$25 million.

But if the regional economic development council isn't successful, Islip will only get \$1 million from the state for the project, jeopardizing the town's bid to land the FAA facility.

That's a lot of pressure on the members, and especially co-chairmen, of the regional council, who included the TRACON project as an extension of the Ronkonkoma Hub.

"Islip's proposal was consistent with all of the other plans [for the Hub]," said Kevin Law, a co-chairman of the regional council. "We believe it will trigger more economic development at the Hub."

The regional council will make its pitch to a state judging committee later this fall, and the announcement of the awards is expected later this year.

Should Islip walk away with only \$1 million for MacArthur, Islip Town Supervisor Tom Croci said he thinks providing more than 60 acres on the airport's east side for the new station might be enough to sway the FAA, which is expected to make its decision by next spring.

"Our contention is if the FAA is concerned about its budget, they'll want to choose a location without spending a lot of money on land acquisition," Croci said.

Gregory McGuirk, an associate professor at Daytona College of Aviation who worked for the FAA for 35 years, said several municipalities offered free land a few years ago when the FAA was attempting to relocate its Potomac facility near Washington, D.C.

"Just because [Islip] is trying to sweeten the pot, don't think other areas won't be doing the same," McGuirk said.

The FAA has said it wants its facility on 60 or more acres within a 150-mile radius of the city. Its final decision will be made with input from congressional and union leaders. The National Air Traffic Controllers' Association has stayed neutral on the matter, but 30 percent of its 600-plus members on

Long Island will likely retire if the facility was moved upstate. Many of those members have attended rallies imploring the FAA to keep the facility on Long Island.

But the final decision will come from the House of Representatives, McGuirk said, as those on Capitol Hill are the ones who fund the FAA.

Next Page –[Page Two](#)



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Previous Page –[Page One](#)



Islip Supervisor Tom Croci

While no New York representatives serve on the House's Aviation Subcommittee, Rep. Tim Bishop, D-Southampton, is a member of the overarching Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. A spokesman for Bishop said he had nothing new to report on efforts to keep the facility on Long Island.

FAA officials did not return requests for comment.

The FAA hasn't said much of anything recently, not since its acting administrator toured the MacArthur property in July with a slew of town and federal elected officials pushing for Islip as the TRACON facility's site.

The visit did bring some good news for Long Islanders, though. Croci said the FAA told him at the time it had ceased looking in New Jersey for sites for the new facility. Until that point, published reports had suggested the federal agency was leaning toward building the facility at Newark Liberty International Airport. Both LaGuardia and John F. Kennedy airports have also been ruled out, Islip officials said.

Even with the big three gone, MacArthur is hardly a shoo-in. The FAA is in discussions with several other airports around the state, including Stewart International Airport, in the Hudson Valley.

Also, Southampton town officials said they recently asked the FAA to consider Francis S. Gabreski Airport in Westhampton for the facility. Southampton Supervisor Anna Throne-Holst said Gabreski offers several advantages over MacArthur, including less density in the surrounding area and increased security due to the presence of the Air National Guard on site.

"From a security and practicality standpoint, we think we have a lot to offer," Throne-Holst said.

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